



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
June 7, 2004

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North Dakota Department of Health Urges Playground Safety

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health urges people to look for and eliminate potential dangers from public and home playground equipment that could lead to injuries and even death this summer.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), more than 200,000 children are treated in the nation's hospital emergency rooms for playground equipment-related injuries each year; of those, about 148,000 involve public playground equipment and about 51,000 involve home playground equipment. In addition, about 15 children die each year as a result of playground equipment-related incidents.

“The majority of playground injuries occur to children ages 2 through 9, and most of the injuries are caused by falls,” said Dawn Mayer, health educator with the North Dakota Department of Health's Injury Prevention Program. “These are mainly falls from the equipment to the ground, but falls from one piece of equipment to another also are reported. Most of the deaths are caused by strangulation, although some are the result of falls.”

Other ways children are injured on the playground include impact with moving and nonmoving equipment and contact with hardware that pinches, has gaps or has sharp edges.

“Because we know the majority of playground injuries are caused by falls, we can help prevent or reduce the injuries by providing a safer landing surface,” Mayer said. “We may not be able to prevent every fall, but we can at least cushion the fall. Grass, turf, asphalt and concrete are not recommended surfaces for playground equipment because they have poor shock-absorbing properties.”

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Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

The state health department and the CPSC recommend the following safety checklist for public and home playground environments:

- Install and maintain a shock-absorbing surface around the play equipment. Use at least 9 inches of wood chips, mulch or shredded rubber for play equipment up to 7 feet high. If sand or pea gravel is used, install at least a 9-inch layer for play equipment up to 5 feet high. Another option is to use surfacing mats made of safety-tested rubber or rubber-like materials.
- Install protective surfacing at least 6 feet in all directions from play equipment. For swings, make sure surfacing extends in the back and front, twice the height of the suspending bar.
- Never attach – or allow children to attach – ropes, jump ropes, clotheslines or pet leashes to play equipment; children can strangle in these.
- Check for hardware that can be hazardous, like open “S” hooks or protruding bolt ends.
- Check for spaces that could trap children, such as openings in guardrails or between ladder rungs; these spaces should measure less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches.
- Make sure platforms and ramps have guardrails to prevent falls.
- Check for sharp points or edges on equipment.
- Remove tripping hazards like exposed concrete footings, tree stumps and rocks.
- Regularly check play equipment and surfacing to make sure both are in good condition.
- Carefully supervise children on play equipment to make sure they are safe.

The CPSC has published a handbook for playground safety that contains more detailed information, including recommendations about playground surfacing materials, equipment layout and design, suggested maintenance checklists, general hazards and more.

For more information about playground safety or to receive a copy of the CPSC *Handbook for Playground Safety*, contact Dawn Mayer, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2493 or visit the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission website at www.cpsc.gov.

-- 30 --

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